The First Uprising of the Cultural Revolution at Nanjing University
Dynamics, Nature and Interpretation

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Chaos theory implies that the beating of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil might indirectly set off a tornado in Texas months later. If we apply this principle to research on China’s Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong no doubt was the butterfly. Thanks to many works on Chinese elite politics published in Chinese and English, we understand very well why Mao flapped his wings.¹ But without intensive research on the mass politics of the period, we still cannot explain why the breeze caused by Mao’s wings ultimately had such a disastrous impact across the country. This article explores that question by focusing on a case study of Nanjing University (NJU).

The “2 June Incident,” publicized by People’s Daily along with an important editorial, made NJU famous throughout China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.² Nanjing University was actually the second best known incident, immediately after the Beijing University (BJU) case. The BJU affair


². The coverage was titled “Nanjing daxue jiuchu fandang fanshehuizhuyi de fangeming fenzi Kuang Yaming” [Nanjing University Exposes the Anti-party, Anti-socialism, and Anti-revolution Element Kuang Yaming]. The editorial was entitled “Fangshou fadong qunzhong, chedi dadao fangeming heibang” [Mobilize the Masses with a Free Hand, Beat Down the Counterrevolutionary Black Gang Thoroughly], People’s Daily (Beijing), 16 June 1996, p. 1.
has been covered extensively, but until now there has been no published re-
search on the incident at NJU.3

Even though the People's Daily interpreted the “2 June Incident” at NJU
as analogous to the BJU events, the Nanjing case was in fact very different
both in its origins and in the way it unfolded. At Beijing University, the “Nie
Yuanzi Wall Poster Incident” was directly connected with elite politics. The
criticism of Song Shuo, the deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Univer-
sity Bureau; of Lu Ping, the leader of the BJU’s Communist Party committee
and president of the university; and of Peng Peiyun, an official in the Beijing
Municipal University Bureau and newly appointed vice party leader of BJU
was inspired by Kang Sheng and his wife, Cao Yi’ou, who were affiliated with
the radical clique surrounding Mao. The purpose of the campaign was to le-
gitimize the purge of Peng Zhen, the Beijing municipal party chief, by expos-
ing the Beijing municipal party committee’s alleged “crime” of “conducting
the bourgeois reactionary educational black line.”

By contrast, the “2 June Incident” at NJU transpired in a much different
context. All sources indicate that until the “January Revolution” of 1967,
Jiang Weiqing, the party leader in Jiangsu Province, was trusted and protected
by Mao and other central party leaders. Similarly, Kuang Yaming, the leader
of the NJU party committee and president of the university, won a modicum
of recognition from Mao because of his active performance in the “Four
Cleans” movement in 1965.4 Therefore, the NJU incident initially had no
direct connection with inner-party purges and resulted instead from intra-
campus conflicts.

This article explains how a small dispute within a local work unit became
a nationally famous incident. The NJU case offers insight into what the Cul-
tural Revolution meant to ordinary people and how they chose or were forced
to play a role in the movement. The relationship between Kuang Yaming and
the NJU students evolved from unity to discord to confrontation, all based on

3. The most important items on the BJU incident include Yin Hongbiao, “Wenge de diyi zhangle
maliezhuyi dazibao” [The First Marxist-Leninist Wall Poster of the Cultural Revolution], Ershi’yi shiji
[Twenty-First Century], Vol. 36 (August 1996), pp. 37–45; Yin Hongbiao, “Quanguo diyi zhangle
maliezhuyi dazibao chulong ji” [The Publication of the First Marxism-Leninism Wall Poster in the
Nation], Bai nian chao [Hundred Year Tide], No. 7 (1999), pp. 35–40; and Party History Research
Institute of BJU, “Kang Sheng , Cao Yi’ou yu diyi zhangle dazibao” [The Relationship of the First Wall
Poster with Kang Sheng and Cao Yi’ou], Bai nian chao, No. 9 (2001), pp. 32–38. Many books on the
Chinese Cultural Revolution mention the incident, although most of these accounts are very brief.

4. In June 1965, at the behest of Kuang Yaming, Nanjing Daxue Xuebao (Academic Journal of Nanjing
University) published three articles by young faculty members from the philosophy, literature, and
history departments describing their changes of views during the “Four Cleans” movement. Mao re-
portedly read those articles and praised them. Kuang was excited by the news, a sentiment he con-
vveyed to many of his subordinates. Interview with Qin Hao, in Nanjing, 8 February 2007. Qin was a
junior staff member in the NJU propaganda department at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.
His account matches those of several others who were at NJU.
a series of misunderstandings. These misunderstandings, in turn, reflected the inherent flaws of the Stalinist political regime established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao, including the political structure, administrative principles, and pattern of communication. This case sheds new light on the complexity of the Cultural Revolution and helps students of Chinese history to understand better the general nature and characteristics of Chinese politics during Mao’s time.

The Paradox of Political Practice: The Background of the “2 June Incident”

The NJU “2 June Incident” can be understood only in the context of the two key principles of Chinese politics during the Mao era—the principles of “party leadership” and “democratic centralism.” These euphemistically named concepts actually referred to the unchallenged authority of the Communist Party in all political and economic matters and the extreme centralization of decision-making under the highest leader of each party committee. No action was condoned unless it came from the party and specifically from the party leader in a given unit. Criticizing the party leader was tantamount to opposing the party, which was a capital crime. These concepts were intensified during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. As a result, when any new political campaign began, nobody dared to express disagreement. On the contrary, everyone would actively agree and claim to be an ardent supporter of the latest campaign.

In at least some cases, however, dissenting opinions were bound to arise. Furthermore, the leadership of party committees involved hundreds of thousands of individual cadres. Much of the time, the central CCP leaders gave only relatively vague guidance to outlying regions. The task of transforming this guidance into concrete, feasible measures was left to party leaders at different levels. The way individual party leaders construed directives from the center was shaped by their own outlook and the specific situations they faced. Some variation in policy implementation was permitted under normal situations, but if discord had previously surfaced within a unit, opponents of the unit’s party leaders could seek to denounce them for violating central directives. Far from going against the CCP, the rivals of the local leaders in such cases would look to the center in Beijing as their source of legitimacy. The local party leaders, for their part, could try to exploit the party leadership principle and the experience of the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign by labeling their opponents as “anti-party rightists” and beating them down. Thus, even
though the central CCP’s dominance was never at risk, feuds between the local party leaders and their subordinates were possible if one or more of the local officials were judged as having “incorrectly” followed the center’s guidance.

Moreover, the political tendency of the Mao period was one of incessant political campaigns, each of which left victims and political cleavages in its wake. These upheavals created great insecurity among the majority of ordinary people, including basic party cadres like Kuang Yaming. Whenever a new political campaign unfolded, every person’s first thought was how to avoid becoming a sacrificial lamb. Showing unconditional obedience to the highest authorities and actively conforming to the demands of the current campaign was the most important method of self-protection. Additionally, those who felt that they might become targets of the campaign had a strong incentive to take the initiative in defining the campaign’s direction. Although China in the Mao era supposedly was aiming to create a public-spirited and unselfish “new socialist man,” the outcome in reality was a deformed social psychology of protecting oneself at all costs and remaining unconcerned about sacrificing others. The NJU events were a product of these circumstances.

**Setting Up the Liyang Branch Campus: An Action to Please Mao**

The “2 June Incident” did not occur on the school’s main campus in downtown Nanjing. Instead, it occurred at a new branch campus in rural Liyang County, some sixty miles outside the city. The proposal to establish the Liyang branch had come from Kuang Yaming in his role as First Secretary of the university party committee, in response to Mao’s negative comments in 1964 and 1965 about the state of higher education, especially the humanities. During the Chinese New Year Festival of 1964, when Mao was chatting with other central leaders, he had said: “Now schools have too many courses; it is not good, making the students strained every day. . . . It is not good for students to read books every day, they should participate in some manual labor and other social activities.” In August 1964, when Mao met with a delegation of educators from Nepal, he declared that “humanities students should take the whole society as their factory. The teachers and students should link

up with farmers and municipal workers, and with the production process of industry and agriculture. Otherwise, they will be useless after graduation.” In November 1965, Mao said during one of his nationwide inspection tours: “The current education system needs reform. . . . The humanities education in university needs only two-and-a-half to three years—we need more educational institutes like the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University.” In December 1965, Mao told the Hangzhou Conference:

We must reform education in the humanities universities. The students must be sent down to the workshop of industry, agriculture, and business. . . . If university education needs five years, then let the students stay in the workshops for three years. The teachers should be sent down too; let them participate in productive activities and simultaneously teach classes. Why not teach philosophy, literature, and history off campus? Must they be taught inside huge, foreign-style buildings?

Heeding Mao’s views, the Ministry of Higher Education convened a China-wide conference of university presidents in Beijing in December 1965 and urged the participants to experiment. In mid-January 1966 the NJU party committee adopted its “Decision to Establish Liyang Branch Campus,” a document that glorified Mao’s ideas for shortening the length of college education, breaking through conventional disciplinary boundaries, and encouraging more social participation by students and teachers. The committee proposed to move the philosophy, literature, and history departments to Liyang to set up a new humanities campus that would follow the “half-farming and half-study” model of education. The document pointed out that the key element to see the thing through is to study Chairman Mao’s works closely, to educate the faculty, staff, and students to devote themselves with all their hearts to the revolutionary cause, “first, not to fear hardship and second, not to fear death,” to continue firmly in the direction of “half-farming and half-reading,” to learn from the example of the Daqing [oilfield] workers who combined a revolutionary spirit and a scientific attitude, to encourage everybody to take the initiative, to learn constantly from our experiences, to follow Mao’s di-

6. Ibid., pp. 149–150.
Kuang Yaming’s proposal was based in part on his organizational role in the CCP. As the leader of an outlying party committee, he had to respond zealously to calls from his party superiors. But the radical blueprint also derived from his personal educational background. Kuang had not received a conventional university education. After finishing high school in his hometown of Danyang in Jiangsu Province, he moved to Shanghai, became a radical writer, and was later recruited by Shanghai University. Although called a “university,” Shanghai University, like the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University mentioned by Mao, ran training classes sponsored by the CCP. The purpose of the classes was to indoctrinate students with a revolutionary spirit and skills to mobilize mass movements, which would enable them to serve the party in the future. Kuang’s advocacy of Mao’s ideas was therefore strengthened by his personal sentiments of revolutionary nostalgia.

Because Kuang’s proposal was in line with Mao’s instructions, it was quickly approved by the Ministry of Higher Education. The CCP’s East China Bureau and the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee also expressed their support. After these endorsements, the vast majority of students and teachers responded positively, in part from idealistic emotion and in part from fear of the central authorities. The proposal was quickly implemented. At the end of February, under Kuang’s leadership, more than 500 students and teachers from the philosophy, literature, and history departments moved to the countryside near the Liyang County seat. To embody the spirit of “first, not to fear hardship and second, not to fear death,” the group marched on foot instead of taking buses or trucks, holding red flags high and singing revolutionary songs. It took them three days to reach their destination.

**Discord Brews**

The new campus was originally a collective farm. From March to late May 1966, the humanities teachers and students built the infrastructure of the new

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11. Ibid.
To explore the reasons for the confrontation between Kuang and the students, I interviewed many teachers and students who lived through the “2 June Incident.” Although they had various opinions about Kuang’s motives for setting up the Liyang campus, most of them mentioned features of the Liyang experience that soon gave rise to discord.

The first such feature was tough manual labor. When the 500 teachers and students arrived at Liyang farm, they had no housing except the thirty buildings occupied by the resident farmers. Hence, the first task was to build dormitories, dining facilities, and classrooms as soon as possible. According to the tenet of “doing everything with austerity” set by Kuang, all the work had to be performed by teachers and students. The work was arduous for most because they had never participated in such manual labor. One student from the philosophy department recalled:

There were no ready-made building materials—we had to get them in the mountains about thirty miles away. We worked at the stone-pit, digging out huge stones and sand, then carrying them back to the construction site by truck. . . . We worked a dozen hours every day, which made us exhausted after a few days. One day a male student fainted at the work site. When he was sent to the hospital, the rest of us were very envious of him; he could get some rest, while we had to keep on working.15

The second feature was the austerity of daily life at Liyang. Even today there is a huge gap between China’s urban and rural areas in lifestyle and quality of life. During the establishment of the Liyang campus in the mid-1960s, daily life for teachers and students became even more difficult. Simple houses, or gandalei, a distinctive revolutionary symbol of the Yan’an spirit, were built quickly. The building materials were limited to stone, sand, bamboo, rice straw, earth, and cloth coated with bitumen. This kind of house could not protect inhabitants from heat in summer or cold in winter. When it rained or snowed, the situation became worse. Usually, a single huge dormitory room was filled with 70–80 students; personal sanitation and privacy were minimal. A student from the history department recalled another acute problem:

The biggest headache was the water shortage. There was a small reservoir near the farm, which could satisfy the daily needs of the farm workers’ families. But when we suddenly came with more than 500 people, the water in the reservoir was obviously not sufficient. President Kuang tried hard to find an underground water source but failed. Therefore, when summer was coming, most teachers and students became worried. It seemed that we could not even get a daily bath after hard work in the heat. Another headache was mosquitoes. The mosquitoes

15. Jing Shenghong, interview, Nanjing, 10 March 2006.
in Liyang countryside were much fiercer than those in Nanjing. Who could be happy there? All of us wished that we could go back to Nanjing sooner.16

A third feature giving rise to discord was the constraints on learning. To finish the fundamental infrastructure as soon as possible, students did not practice the “half-farming and half-reading” model during the first three months. The only “reading” they did was of the newspaper as well as listening to the radio early in the morning and late at night. This kind of “reading” was politically oriented to ensure that they would know about the revolutionary criticism campaign outside. Academic study was given up completely, which caused many students to become highly dissatisfied with Kuang. Some began to wonder aloud whether they would ultimately learn anything from their university education.17

The final point of contention was the prospect of delays. When the conventional graduation date at the end of June was approaching, some final-year students became worried that Kuang’s education reform would delay their job assignment.18

These circumstances led to a common desire to return to Nanjing and regular university life, feelings that intensified with the duration of the stay in Liyang. But under the prevailing political circumstances, no one who wanted to avoid serious hardship dared to speak out openly and directly.

Wall Posters in Liyang Campus: Two Kinds of Motives and Implications

On the morning of 2 June, teachers and students at Liyang campus learned about the “Nie Yuanzi Wall Poster Incident” from the Central People’s Radio Station. The first wall poster to appear on the Liyang campus was put up at noon, and more appeared in the afternoon and early evening. All told, more than 270 students and teachers put up wall posters in what became known as the “2 June Wall Poster Incident.”19 Although few of these wall posters survive, their main content is known from their description in the detailed report issued by the New China News Agency on 16 June 1966, “Critical Essays Published by Nanjing University Red Guards during the Cultural Revolu-
tion,” as well as from interviews with participants. The motives and implications of the posters can be divided into two categories.

The first category, which included the vast majority of the wall posters, involved a natural collective response derived from long-time political training under the Communist regime. Most people just wrote a wall poster or signed someone else’s wall poster, unconsciously following others’ example in order to get political credit from the authorities and demonstrate loyalty to the central CCP. Typically, these wall posters expressed zealous support for the “revolutionary action” of Nie Yuanzi and her colleagues and criticized the “bourgeois counterrevolutionary line” in general terms. Except for targets already exposed by the center, nobody was harmed by these wall posters.

The second category, by contrast, revealed more of the authors’ true feelings. While demonstrating the same political posture as the first category, posters in the second category tried to extend the debate from the BJU incident to the NJU, offering veiled criticism of the university authorities. Examples of this kind of poster were *Ten Questions for President Kuang* and *The Discord between the PLA Newspaper Editorial and the Editorial Drafted by Liyang Campus Political Department*. The number of such posters was very small.

The establishment of Liyang campus was an important reason for students’ dissatisfaction. Under the harsh restrictions in Mao’s China, dissatisfaction could not be expressed openly and directly, but in the wake of the BJU incident the Nanjing students tried to express their discontent with an more radical strategy for shaping the narrative. In a few wall posters and private comments, they alleged that Kuang had proposed to set up Liyang campus because he wanted to send the teachers and students down to the countryside to isolate them from the unfolding Cultural Revolution movement. They also claimed that Kuang had made the teachers and students do heavy manual labor every day because he wanted to keep them from participating in political studies and the revolutionary criticism campaign.

20. The only surviving poster I have found is *Liyang fenxiao zhengzhihu anyu yu jiefangjunbao shelun chang fandiao* (Discord between the PLA Newspaper Editorial and the Editorial Drafted by Liyang Campus Political Department). This wall poster was drafted by thirteen students from the history department and was collected in Nanjing University 27 August Revolutionary Liaison Conference, *Baerqi De Guanghui Qizhi*, pp. 23–24.

21. These two wall posters were mentioned in the coverage in *Renmin ribao*, 16 June 1966, p. 1. “The Editorial of the Liyang Campus Political Department” was a document drafted by Kuang himself, which reflected a viewpoint similar to that of the “February Outline” drafted by Peng Zhen.

22. Interviews with Cui Zhiqing and other participants. Those views were later reinforced in revolutionary articles such as Xia and Hu, “Opening Up the Black Curtain of Setting up Liyang Campus by Kuang Yaming”; Zhou Tianchi, “Huiyi Liu er shijian” [Reminiscence of 2 June Incident], *Ba erqi zhanbao* [Fighting Bulletin of the 27 August Faction] (Nanjing), 2 June 1967, p. 2; and “Liu san fangeming shijian qianqian houbou” [Before and after the Counterrevolutionary 3 June Incident], *Nongnu ji* [Spear of Serfs] (Nanjing), 1 June 1967, p. 4.
important step in the development of discord and conflict both at NJU and elsewhere.

**Kuang’s “Counterattack”**: Intensification of the Confrontation

Although Kuang’s proposal to establish the Liyang campus was intended to promote his own career, it was consistent with his loyalty to the party’s cause.\(^{23}\) Hence, he fiercely rejected the charge that he had deliberately subverted the Cultural Revolution. Kuang viewed the wall poster incident as a throwback to the Anti-rightist Campaign in 1957. As he saw it, students using wall posters to criticize him, the party leader, were challenging the authority of the party itself. The suppression of the dissidents would therefore be a vital test of his administrative capability and organizational loyalty. Moreover, Kuang surely harbored internal doubts. As a basic party cadre he could not know for sure what Mao’s intentions were in launching the Cultural Revolution, but from long experience he knew that the campaign would have major consequences. Prior to the “2 June Incident” Kuang had read the “16 May Circular,” from which he knew that “the problem was serious, was expressed forcefully, and potentially included us as well.”\(^{24}\) He therefore had to use his leadership prerogatives to shape the movement and quash any accusations that might be levied against him. He took a first step even before the discontent at Liyang bubbled over on 2 June when, at the end of May, he formed a Cultural Revolution Office to evaluate student attitudes and classify all teachers and students as belonging to one of the four categories. He listed more than 70 individuals in the fourth (most backward) category as targets for attack, thus transforming the “2 June Incident” into a serious confrontation.\(^{25}\)

Kuang went to the Liyang campus on the evening of 2 June and summoned all party members to a meeting to organize his counterattack. On the morning of 3 June, Kuang held another party meeting and instructed all party secretaries and political instructors to intensify their counterattack, concentrating on the teachers and students who had participated in the wall poster “debate sessions.” To demonstrate his firm political position, Kuang repeat-

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23. Kuang said many times that he intended to make the NJU Liyang campus an advanced model in the education field, just like Daqing in industry and Dazhai in agriculture. Success would bolster his standing in the CCP. See Xia and Hu, “Opening up the Black Curtain of Setting up Liyang Campus by Kuang Yaming”; interview with Jiang; interview with Qin; and interview with Cui.

24. Hong Bing, “Kuang Yaming fumie qian de zhengzha” [Kuang Yaming’s Struggle before His Destruction], *Xin Nanda* [New Nanjing University] (Nanjing), 16 May 1968, p. 4.

edly exhorted them: “Do not show any mercy toward these rightists and counterrevolutionaries. You must struggle against them brutally, beat them down, and make them notorious. If someone dies during the struggle session, just drag him out to feed to the dogs.”

Several struggle sessions were held on the Liyang campus, with a dozen teachers and students selected for “concentrated attack.” The members of the CCP and Communist Youth League (CYL) and other political activists in every class were mobilized to force their classmates who had put up wall posters to confess their crimes. One participant vividly described the scene at a typical struggle session:

Several teachers were criticized at first. Among them were Teacher Lin from the philosophy department, Teacher Hu from the Chinese literature department, Teacher Su from the foreign language department, etc. All these teachers were in their 30s. Because we students were much younger, President Kuang thought they were the masterminds behind the wall poster incident. After criticizing the teachers, they started to criticize some student cadres. The first was Hu Caiji, an elder student from the Chinese literature department, a Party member, who was acting as the chairman of the student union at that time. The second was Sun Jiazheng, who came from the same department, then acting as CYL secretary of the department. The third one was Zhu Yingcai, from the philosophy department, who was a Party member and student cadre, too. . . . All of them were thought to be the behind-the-scenes masterminds. That was the first time I participated in this kind of struggle session. I was filled with horrible feelings. “Struggle session” means that if someone was selected as a target, all others were mobilized to attack him, while he had no chance to explain and excuse himself. The attackers always used the thinking, logic, and language of “class struggle.” Your daily performance was inspected according to the revolutionary standard. Even some very private conversations were exposed by people you thought were close friends, which made you feel naked in public. When I saw the targets being criticized on stage, some of them even being beaten by the strugglers, I became afraid.

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27. Interview with Jing Shenghong, Nanjing, 10 March 2006. Hu Caiji was born in 1934 in Shandong to a family of peasants. As a young man he joined the party and participated in revolutionary work. In 1962 as a “cadre transfer student” he entered Nanjing University and soon became chairman of the university’s student association. After the “2 June Incident” and the conflict with Kuang, he was celebrated by the Jiangsu provincial party committee as one of the first “rebel heroes” in the province. After the Red Guard movement appeared, he organized Nanjing University’s Red Flag Fighting Group, which sought to defend the provincial party committee and confronted the rebel faction. After the collapse of the provincial party committee he became inactive until he was assigned a job and left the university in 1968. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 he was appointed deputy head of the provincial education department. During the campaign against former Red Guards in the early 1980s, he was denounced by Kuang, but he was protected by an important Jiangsu Province leader, Xu Jiatun. Xu later was assigned to work in Hong Kong and brought Hu with him. After Xu defected to
This reminiscence is supported by other sources. According to official figures, from 2 to 5 June more than 70 people were criticized in various “debate sessions,” including sixty-four students, four teachers, and two workers. Among them were nine CCP members and twenty-two CYL members. 28 Many students who ultimately escaped public humiliation nonetheless could not eat or sleep normally during that period because of the emotional pressure. 29

Kuang’s counterattack was doomed, however. He misjudged the motives and implications of most of the wall posters, overestimated the number and strength of the dissidents, and made many enemies unnecessarily. When he selected a dozen people as key targets, he made an even bigger mistake. There was no evidence to support his assumption that they had masterminded the incident. For example, Teacher Su signed a wall poster at the request of the students but had not intended to challenge Kuang’s leadership. 30 Student cadres like Hu Caiji, because of their roles in the CCP, had refused to sign the wall poster written by their classmates. 31 Many people suffered mental and physical abuse during the counterattack because of statements in Kuang’s radical mobilization talk; for example, “you should not show any mercy to the rightists and anti-revolutionaries” and “if someone dies in the struggle session, just drag him out to feed to the dogs.”

Kuang’s counterattack had two consequences. On the one hand, using the threat of coercion, Kuang restored order at the Liyang campus, allowing construction to resume. On the other hand, his tactics caused more discon-

the United States in 1989, Hu was forced to take early retirement from his post. Sun Jiazheng, from the family of a revolutionary martyr, was a third-year student in the Chinese department at the outset of the Cultural Revolution and was the Secretary of the department’s Communist Youth League General Branch. Because of the “2 June Incident” and the conflict with Kuang, he was designated as one of the first “rebels” by the provincial party committee. During the Red Guard movement he joined the school’s Red Flag Fighting Group and defended the provincial party committee, becoming inactive after the party’s collapse. In 1968 he was sent to the countryside to work as a farmer. After the end of the Cultural Revolution he was named a party vice-secretary of a county in northern Jiangsu Province, a secretary on the provincial Youth League Secretariat, and provincial vice-secretary of the party, in addition to holding other posts. He has been China’s minister of culture since 1998. Zhu Yingcai was a party member, student cadre, and third-year student in the politics department. As a result of his conflict with Kuang he was designated one of the first “rebels” of the province and became inactive after the fall of the provincial party committee. In 1968 he was assigned to a propaganda unit under the PLA’s General Logistics Department in northeast China.

28. “Nanjing daxue geming shisheng jiuchu fandang fan shehuizhuyi de fangeming fenzi Kuang Yaming” [Revolutionary Faculty and Students at Nanjing University Expose the Anti-party, Anti-socialist, Counterrevolutionary Element Kuang Yaming], Renmin ribao (Beijing), 16 June 1966, p. 1.

29. Cui Zhiqing, interview, Nanjing, 1 March 2006. Cui’s account matches those of many others I interviewed.

30. Su Shouqi, interview by telephone, 8 April 2006.

tent, especially among the innocent people chosen by Kuang as his targets. This second consequence soon caused a powerful backlash.

**The Center’s Intervention Reverses the Situation**

Kuang’s handling of the Liyang incident caused disagreement within the university party committee. Someone on the committee (it is not known who) gave a report to the provincial party committee. The leader of the provincial party committee transferred the report to the central authorities in Beijing. In light of Mao’s handling of the BJU case just a few days earlier, Kang Sheng, Mao’s watchdog and the chief leader of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, returned a swift verdict: The Nanjing students’ wall posters were a “revolutionary action,” and Kuang’s reaction to the posters reflected his anti-party, anti-socialist, and anti-Mao thought tendencies, for which he must be punished.

After receiving instructions from the central CCP authorities, the provincial party committee convened an emergency conference on 6 June and stripped Kuang of all his posts. Then on 8 June, a liaison group was sent to Liyang campus to support the students’ revolutionary action. One student later recalled:

> On the evening of 8 June, the broadcast station at the Liyang campus suddenly played the song “The East Is Red” and called on all students to assemble on the field in front of the cafeteria. After we all arrived, the representative from the provincial party committee made his announcement: “You students will not see Kuang Yaming again; he was removed because of his mistake.” Then he went on to say: “You students are right to write wall posters against Kuang! Your action is a revolutionary action!” Hearing this announcement, all of us cried with excitement. We shouted out loudly in support of the decision.

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33. Hu Caiji, interview, Nanjing, 22 April 2007. Hu knew the center’s verdict process because Kang Sheng told him the whole story after the incident. In a meeting with Jiangsu rebels somewhat later, Kang said: “As soon as Kuang Yaming was dragged out, I immediately called for it to be publicized . . . that guy surrendered to the enemy, I know him. In his thinking and behavior he is always looking to profit. It’s not coincidental that he suppressed you as soon as the Cultural Revolution began.” See “Zhongyang shouzhang lun Kuang Yaming” [Central Leaders on Kuang Yaming], *Xin Nanda*, 6 January 1968, p. 1. See also “Zhongyang shouzhang jiejian Jiangsu zhu jing daibiaotuan de jianghua” [Central Leaders’ Talks with the Jiangsu Delegation in the Capital], 18 November 1967, in Song, ed., *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*.


35. Jing Shenghong, interview, Nanjing, 10 March 2006.
Another student recalled that the announcement immediately raised a new and deeply divisive issue: what about the many students who had eagerly cooperated with Kuang’s erroneous campaign? When the representative from the provincial party committee said, “Your action has the support of the provincial party committee, you are not a counterrevolutionary vanguard as alleged by Kuang, you are the revolutionary vanguard indeed!” the audience responded with loud cheers and applause. Then suddenly someone in the audience shouted out: “Since we are the revolutionary vanguard, what are those people who criticized us during Kuang’s counterattack?” Clearly, some of the students wanted to retaliate against their strugglers. The representative said: “We should take Kuang as our main target; you students should not attack each other any more.” But most of the students ignored his admonition. Many new wall posters appeared, and this time in addition to Kuang the party secretaries and political tutors and “leftist” students became targets. Wall posters were written at will, and the campus fell into chaos.

This student later described the situation:

On 9 June a university leader came to Liyang from Nanjing. No sooner had his car entered the gate than he was surrounded by students. He conveyed a three-point directive from the provincial party committee: (1) Kuang is the same as Lu at BJU—both of them should be beaten down; (2) the NJU party committee is not the same as the BJU party committee. The NJU party committee is good, you should not conflate them; (3) the humanities teachers and students should stay in Liyang, conducting the Cultural Revolution on the one hand, and constructing the new campus on the other. Before the leader finished his talk, one student shouted out: “We want to conduct the Cultural Revolution movement back in Nanjing!” His request evoked an enthusiastic response from other students. The leader insisted: “You should not go back to Nanjing, you should stay in Liyang.” Someone said: “Why should we stay in Liyang? How can we struggle with Kuang when he is not here?” Another said: “Who can stop us if we really want to go back to Nanjing? We are tough! We can walk back to Nanjing on foot, learning from the example of the Red Army’s long march!” The leader realized that the situation was out of control. He wanted to pull himself away, but the students did not let him go. They forced him to call the provincial party committee to convey the request. Finally, the provincial party committee sent several dozen trucks to bring all teachers and students at the Liyang campus back to Nanjing.36

On 10 June, the teachers and students went back to the main Nanjing campus. To welcome the triumph of these “revolutionary vanguards,” the provincial and university party committees organized a grand ceremony. Not only

The science teachers and students at the main campus mobilized to salute them at the entrance, but many representatives from other party units were summoned to participate in the welcoming ceremony to display broad support for their struggle against the “three-anti” element represented by Kuang. The names of all 270 people who had participated in the wall poster activities at Liyang were printed on a huge sheet of red paper called the “list of the glorious.”

The People’s Daily Interpretation of the “2 June Incident”

The nature and dynamic of the “2 June Incident” is clear. Neither the students who became involved in the wall poster campaign nor Kuang, who launched a counterattack, had intended to overthrow the political status quo. Their intentions, on the contrary, were to show their support for the status quo. However, starting from different stances and viewpoints, they had different understandings of what constituted a correct stance. The vast majority of students derived their ideas from mainstream propaganda, whereas Kuang was guided by the Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957. Even among the radical student dissidents, dissatisfaction was originally limited to certain concrete policies. The students had no intention of challenging the regime or even challenging Kuang’s party committee. They simply wanted to use the campaign to extricate themselves from the hardships in Liyang. The confrontation between Kuang and the students intensified partly because of the students’ radical narrative strategy and partly because of Kuang’s misjudgments and arbitrary measures. The rhetoric and practices of both sides were deeply rooted in the political norms established after 1949, reflecting the pressure from the central regime and the structural flaws of Chinese politics during Mao’s time, including the CCP’s organizational structure, administrative principles, and manner of communication.

However, the front-page coverage by the New China News Agency (NCNA) and an accompanying editorial in Renmin ribao on 16 June 1966 gave this incident a quite different interpretation. On the afternoon of 12 June, a representative from the provincial party committee chaired a mass rally of some 10,000 people at the NJU athletic field to criticize Kuang Yaming. The NCNA coverage of the event indicated that the reporters’ understanding of the NJU incident was colored by radical ideology and the cen-
ter’s verdict. The NCNA reported that the rally was convened to announce the provincial party committee’s decision to strip Kuang of all his posts. After the announcement was read, according to the coverage, the audience responded with ardent cheers and applause and shouted, “Long live the Chinese Communist Party!” “Long live Chairman Mao!” Then Hu Caiji, Zhu Yingcai, Sun Jiazheng, and Wang Xiaozhong, who were the student representatives, and Su Shouqi, who was the teacher representative, spoke at the rally, exposing with great anger Kuang’s “three-anti” crimes at the Liyang campus. According to the NCNA, the four speakers ardently supported the decision of the provincial party committee and expressed their resolve: “With the leadership of our great party, using Mao’s great thought as a weapon, with the broad support of the masses, we certainly will expose all the monsters and freaks like Kuang. We will not stop our struggle until they are beaten down thoroughly.” Chen Jiping, the student representative from the science departments, then took the stage to express sympathy and support for the dissidents at Liyang campus, saying “Mao Zedong Thought is our life. The people who dare to be against Mao’s thought are our mortal enemy. We will struggle with them to the end, no matter how old they are or what high rank they occupy inside of the Party.”38 The accusations and revolutionary rhetoric conveyed in the NCNA coverage are roughly the same as those used in Nie Yuanzi’s wall poster and the People’s Daily commentary published two weeks earlier.

The NCNA’s skewed coverage was echoed in a People’s Daily editorial titled “Mobilize the Masses with a Free Hand, Beat Down the Anti-revolutionary Black Gang Thoroughly”:

What does the incident of Kuang’s suppression of the revolutionary mass movement tell us? It tells us that monsters and freaks like Kuang, the black gang of anti-Party, anti-socialist counterrevolutionaries, will not retreat from the historical stage voluntarily. They will not admit their failures. On the contrary, they will conduct their death-struggle to suppress the revolutionary mass movement, to maintain their tottering counterrevolutionary regime.

The editorial added:

Concerning those departments and units whose leadership has been usurped by representatives of the bourgeoisie, the Cultural Revolution means a struggle to seize power. The purpose of the struggle is to seize back the proletarian dictatorship from the bourgeois dictatorship. This kind of struggle must not be carried out in a conciliatory way, with slogans like “peaceful transition” or “combining two into one.” It must be carried out in a thoroughly revolutionary way. We

must dig out all monsters and freaks, beat them down, and make them notorious.39

In both cases the description and interpretation of the “2 June Incident” were highly distorted, even fictionalized. But this stylized depiction, backed by powerful propaganda, became dominant and had an extensive impact. The complex confrontation between dissidents and Kuang was shorn of its complexity and transformed into a fatal struggle between “revolutionary” and “counterrevolutionary” forces. Kuang was branded a villain, and Hu Caiji and other dissidents were labeled “rebel heroes.” According to the People’s Daily editorial, the party committee at Liyang campus was reformed on 4 July. A cadre sent by the provincial party committee was appointed to the top post, and Hu Caiji, the representative of the dissident students, was appointed his deputy. Other famous dissidents filled the remaining leadership spots.

Subsequent Developments

The “2 June Incident” was undoubtedly the starting point of NJU’s Cultural Revolution. However, none of the people involved in the incident—neither Kuang, the dissident students, nor the provincial party leaders—knew Mao’s intention in launching the Cultural Revolution. They tried to conform to the CCP’s demands based on their own understanding. Subsequent political developments at NJU were driven by radicalized propaganda and force of inertia from the previous period.

Unlike at BJU, where Nie Yuanzi and her colleagues tightly controlled power in the school as celebrated “rebels” until the summer of 1968, power at NJU shifted into the hands of a provincial work team soon after the “2 June Incident.” Although the members of the work team declared that they would support the mass movement without reservation, they tried hard to assert control of the movement. Any spontaneous tendency was suppressed. After hearing of the Liyang incident, a few radical students from the foreign language department and science departments who were still at the main campus put up wall posters on 3 June to criticize wrongdoings of the NJU party committee. This action also sparked a counterattack from the university authorities.40 When the work team arrived, the students on the Nanjing campus assumed that the verdict against them would be overturned, as with their

counterparts in Liyang. However, the work team pursued a conservative policy, insisting that except for Kuang himself the NJU party committee was generally good and should not be overthrown. This self-contradictory attitude understandably angered the students involved in the 3 June wall poster incident.

Some militant students were dissatisfied when the work team tried to stop them from torturing Kuang and other targets during struggle sessions. When Mao criticized the actions of work teams and ordered their withdrawal at the end of July, the students rose up and started to criticize the work team. Many others followed their example. To curtail the incipient rebellion and prevent direct clashes with the dissidents, the work team adopted a “divide and rule” strategy. Most CCP members, CYL members, student cadres, and other political activists were mobilized to defend the work team. Hu Caiji, Sun Jiazheng, Zhu Yingcai, and other humanities students, partly because of their own CCP membership and partly because of their salvation after the Liyang incident, became the backbone of the defenders. The conflict generated two major Red Guard factions in late August: the conservatives and the rebels. After the mass movement crept out of the university campus and took aim at the provincial party committee in late autumn, Hu, Sun, and Zhu led a citywide conservative mass organization and remained active on the political stage until the collapse of the provincial party apparatus during the “January Storm” of 1967. The intra-campus confrontation between conservative and rebel students was quickly replaced by the confrontation between two wings of the original rebels.41 After being marginalized for nearly a year-and-a-half, Hu, Sun, and Zhu were assigned jobs and left NJU in the autumn of 1968.

Kuang Yaming no doubt was the biggest loser during the Cultural Revolution because of the center’s verdict. During the high tide of the mass movement in 1966 and 1967, the rival mass organizations, including the conservatives and the disputed rebels, competed with one another to attack him and thereby flaunt their revolutionary stance. The forging of the “Great Alliance” in the spring of 1968 did not change his fate. Afterward, whenever a new campaign arrived—whether under military personnel, the workers’ propaganda team, or the newly rehabilitated cadres—Kuang was always chosen as the main target of struggle. His nightmare lasted until Mao’s death in 1976.

In May 1978, the provincial party committee restored Kuang to his former posts as NJU’s party leader and president. By this point, almost all the former rebel leaders had been purged, and some imprisoned. However, the now-rehabilitated former provincial leaders promoted quite a few former conservative student leaders, such as Hu and Sun, to high positions because of their loyalty to the work team and provincial leadership during the first stage of the Cultural Revolution. Kuang tried hard to get them removed in the early 1980s when an investigation targeted former Cultural Revolution radicals, but the provincial leaders blocked his efforts.

**Conclusion**

Although Nanjing University’s “2 June Incident” initially was a product of internecine conflict within a party unit, the wider political environment also played a key role. Central propaganda put forth a revolutionary interpretation of the incident only because the radical clique in Beijing tried to exploit it to shape the direction of the unfolding campaign, to highlight the necessity of the Cultural Revolution, and to promote radical movements around the country.

Most so-called rebel heroes in the Liyang incident, such as Hu Caiji, were CCP members and student cadres. They were no different from those of the “left force” on whom Kuang depended for his counterattack. Hu and several other student cadres were selected as the targets of Kuang’s counterattack and were subsequently labeled “rebel heroes” by the provincial party committee not because of their personal will and actions, but because of political expediency. Hence, the incident was not the product of a conflict involving interest groups with different political orientations, rather, it was the result of a series of unanticipated interactions and conflicts in a particular historical context.

The dissatisfaction among the students and teachers indicates that long-term ideological indoctrination did not in fact eliminate self-interested considerations, an outcome that is ironic given the “thought reform” approach advocated by Mao. But because of the strong impact of the revolutionary ideology on social life at that time, the dissidents had to use the radical narrative


43. Interviews with Hu Caiji and Jiang.
strategy to express their true desires. The politics of Mao’s time changed people’s outward behavior but not their inner character.

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